

COOLIDGE, CALVIN

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# Speeches Honoring Abraham Lincoln

Calvin Coolidge

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LINCOLN DAY PROCLAMATION  
January 30, 1919.

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS  
By His Excellency Calvin Coolidge, Governor.

A PROCLAMATION

Fivescore and ten years ago that Divine Providence which infinite repetition has made only the more a miracle sent into the world a new life, destined to save a nation. No star, no sign, foretold his coming. About his cradle all was poor and mean save only the source of all great men, the love of a wonderful woman. When she faded away in his tender years, from her deathbed in humble poverty she dowered her son with greatness. There can be no proper observance of a birthday which forgets the mother. Into his origin as into his life men long have looked and wondered. In wisdom great, but in humility greater, in justice strong, but in compassion stronger, he became a leader of men by being a follower of the truth. He overcame evil with good. His presence filled the Nation. He broke the might of oppression. He restored a race to its birthright. His mortal frame has vanished, but his spirit increases with the increasing years, the richest legacy of the greatest century.

Men show by what they worship what they are. It is no accident that before the great example of American manhood our people stand with respect and reverence. And in accordance with this sentiment our laws have provided for a formal recognition of the birthday of Abraham Lincoln, for in him is revealed our ideal, the hope of our country fulfilled.

Now, therefore, by the authority of Massachusetts, the 12th day of February is set apart as

LINCOLN DAY

and its observance recommended as befits the beneficiaries of his life and the admirers of his character, in places of education and worship wherever our people meet with one another.

Given at the Executive Chamber, in Boston, this 30th day of January, in the Year of Our Lord one thousand nine hundred and nineteen, and of the independence of the United States of America the one hundred and forty-third.

CALVIN COOLIDGE.

By his Excellency the Governor,

Albert P. Langtry  
Secretary of the Commonwealth.

God save the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.



THE WHITE HOUSE,  
February 12, 1923.

Address of the President Monday evening, February 12th, at the Lincoln Day dinner tendered by friends of Lincoln Memorial University.  
To be released when delivery begins:

MR. TOASTMASTER AND GUESTS:

No human story surpasses the fascination and the inspiration of that of Abraham Lincoln. The republic pays tribute tonight, and most of the world is doing him reverence, because in his unshaken faith the world finds its own hopes mightily strengthened. Our words are all feeble, because we are dealing with the Master Martyr, the supreme leader in a national crisis, the surpassing believer in a fulfilled destiny, and a colossal figure among the hero-statesmen of all the ages.

Turning over, in the last few days, the promise I had made to add my own to the testimonies that here are to be spoken, I have been impressively reminded of the greatly revived interest in everything concerning Lincoln, which has marked the past few years, notably the last two. I have been thinking of how many times, in the recent years of the world's trial and travail, I have received books, letters, articles, published literally all over the world, about Lincoln. One can not but have observed how greatly the thoughts of people have turned to this man of vision, the great emancipator, who spoke with the voice of the common people for truth and for freedom. One can not have failed to note that as the fortunes of mankind have confronted tribulation and distress, the minds of men have turned to this son of the yearning, eager, earnest, simple people, and have sought in the story of his life for guidance in the hour of humanity's trial. To me, this has been a portent of hope, a justification of faith, a reason for confidence that men will not only guide the bark of civilization through the storms which beset it, but will at last bring it into the port of a better and happier day.

It does not seem hard to understand why in times like these in which we live there should be such a renaissance of sentiment for Lincoln, of renewed interest in the great lessons of his life. For men have come to think of him as they have not thought of others among the merely human characters of history. Lincoln has appealed to them as one who manifestly was brought forth with the destiny or consecrated by an infinite hand to render a particular service, to save a nation, to emancipate a people, to preserve in the world the fruits of the American experiment in and for democracy. Surely it is not strange that the eyes and the interest of a world should turn to him now, when all mankind feels the need for such leadership and service and direction as he gave. A world, a civilization, an epoch, - all these are facing the bitter need for the moral purpose, the noble aspirations, the high courage, that he interpreted to our America in the days of its crisis. More, humanity itself needs to drink of the cup of unfailing confidence which enabled him to stand erect and unshaken amid discouragements and criticism which would have crushed any less than a master heart and soul.

The world today's civilization brought to its supreme test. Its trial came when it might least have been expected. At the very apex of material advances, when science and industry and invention and culture seemed to have united in justifying man's proudest estimate of his destiny, there came among the nations such a clash of ambitions, such a confusion of ideals, such a crash of conflicting aims and aspirations, as it had never known before. It brought bewildering confusion, and overwhelming amazement to those who had been esteemed the wisest among their kind, and who in the folly of their wisdom had been most certain that such a thing could never happen. And in the very face of havoc wrought, of the utter futility of it all, we still wonder that it could have been.

But the sobering and ~~destroying~~ <sup>distressing</sup> realization has come at last, that in its eagerness to harness and dominate the material forces of the world, humanity had lost its anchorage to the ultimate

things of the higher, the nobler, the spiritual universe. Turning now, in the midst of the wreckage, to seek for whatever can be trusted as safe and strong and lasting, it is not to be wondered that people turn anew the pages of Lincoln's story. In very truth, his soul is marching on. To him it has been given to leave a living inheritance of vital power and supreme inspiration to the race. Out of Lincoln came the proof that lofty achievement is not in ideals alone, but in that spiritual and material justice which is the wholesome blending of infinite purpose and man's capacity for fulfillment.

I spoke a moment ago of the multiplicity of present day writings about Lincoln. They embrace everything from the genealogist's delvings into his ancestry, to the psychologist's and the moralist's searchings into his innermost motives and objectives. Nothing that might possibly reveal any phase of his life and work has been accounted trivial. We are coming year by year to a more truthful and understanding appraisal of him. But all the researches of scholars and efforts of students have brought us little store of real understanding, have taught us wellnigh nothing concerning the supreme providential purpose which permits such a light to shine now and then upon a generation of men. We know not whence come such great souls, such simple wisdom, such capacity for sacrifice and service. But we do know that as men contemplate this strange career and study its wonders and its lessons, they are at least planting in their minds and hearts a certain vague realization of what Lincoln was and meant; a consciousness of his personal significance to them; and with all this, a keen aspiration for some little participation in such a bestowal of selflessness, sacrifice and service as was the life of Lincoln. That aspiration, I firmly believe, is fixed in a greater number of human hearts today than it ever was before. It may be somewhat vague and unformed, yet we readily recognize that it represents something like the aspirations of a race for a new incarnation of the spirit and the leadership of Lincoln.

Doubtless it is vain to hope that another such as he will be given to us and to our time. But to the extent that we shall prove ourselves worthy of such a leader, to that extent we shall be the better able to save ourselves without him. The task which men face throughout the world now is one with which they must cope as God intended. Their hope, their salvation, their destiny, must at last be in their own hands. They will save themselves if they will forget themselves. Probably the task would be less difficult if humanity would get a little nearer to God. In times like these, the fullest, truest service that any nation or any society can render to itself, will be the service which is conceived in unselfishness and rendered without thought of immediate gain, or even of ultimate personal advantage.

We drink from memory, we find inspiration in example, we are exalted by the eternal truths which Lincoln saw and proclaimed, but the highest usefulness in these things is their practical preservation, so as to reveal to all the people a true understanding of Lincoln's transcending eminence. His supreme gift was not in construction, his was the master preservation. And the call of the world today is for preservation for the preserved civilization which is the best judgment of human intelligence since the world began.

Our coming together tonight is due, in large part, to the interest of the sponsors for such an institution as Lincoln would have loved. The Lincoln Memorial University has truly been called a living memorial to the emancipator. It was founded in pursuance of his expressed desire that the light of learning might be carried to the people of that strangely sequestered, mountain community of which his own forbears were members. These people of the southern Appalachian empire number now some six millions. They constitute one of the world's greatest reservoirs of purest Anglo-Saxon stock. Pioneers from the day of the first colonial movement away from the tide-water country, they passed over into the mountains to make their homes, and there they and their descendants have lived, curiously, almost unaccountably aloof from the sweeping tide, the quickening life of those mighty migrations which subdued the continent and made our country. Remote from the outside world, wellnigh forgotten in the activities of the generations that laid down our highways of steel, they have been at times almost a mystery to us. Sturdy, hardy,



independent and self-sufficient, they have lived generation after generation almost to themselves. But not quite; for it stands to the everlasting credit of these men and women of the mountains, that in every time of national need they have been instant in response and magnificent in loyalty. Their sons have stood in thousands against the barbarians of our own wilderness, they battled for Lincoln's concept of union and nationality and with equal steadfastness they have taken their pace on battlefields of Europe and contributed their heroic part that a world civilization might live. The nation owes to them a vast balance of obligation, and the Lincoln Memorial University represents one instalment which devout and unselfish people are paying upon that debt.

It is a strange circumstance that in the rush and eagerness of our continental conquest, such a people as this should, almost by accident, have drifted into the backwaters, and there remain while the surging currents of settlement and development left them generation after generation wellnigh untouched and forgotten. Today they number a population double that of the thirteen colonies on the day when they declared independence; the greatest single reserve in all the land, of untainted, unmixed, pure and pristine American stock. Out of the loins of this community came to us Lincoln, in limb and lineage, in physical and moral power, in moral and mental ruggedness, a very prototype of his own people. From the nation which owes to them its debt for Lincoln and for a myriad of humbler heroes, now most of them forgotten, it is due that the nation should light the way, should fire the beacons to guide this people into the ways of ample education and of ripened opportunity to make their full contribution to the national advancement. It has been told that nowhere in our country is illiteracy among Anglo-Saxons so prevalent, so dominant as among these people of the mountains. To state the fact is to confess remissness. It is a condition which must not be permitted to continue. For the sake of Lincoln, who loved them as his own people; for the sake of ourselves, who will be the equal beneficiaries of their advancement; for the sake of these splendid, loyal unquestioning Americans of the truest strain our nation knows, it is our duty to hold up the hands of the men and women who are carrying on this work of education, who have lighted this lamp of inspiration and leadership for the men and women who have already given and may give again immeasurably to American greatness and the growing glory of the republic.







